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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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30 April 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM: Robert D. Vickers, Jr.
National Intelligence Officer for Latin America

SUBJECT: Latin America Warning and Forecast Meeting
April 1987

1. The following items were discussed at the Intelligence Community's Warning and Forecast Meeting held on 22 April 1987.

Nicaragua

2. The rainy season in Nicaragua will affect the logistical systems and tactics of both sides, but the wet weather will generally favor the insurgents, at least in key areas of operation. In terms of aerial resupply, the heavier and more constant rains in the southeast, for example, will seriously hamper aircraft operations. Maritime resupply will help compensate somewhat, but overflowing waterways and floating debris will increase the risk to the boats. In the northwest and central regions, on the other hand, the rains are more intermittent and, therefore, will have less impact on airdrops. Moreover, the insurgents are in the process of building caches inside Nicaragua and apparently are working to improve overland and maritime resupply capabilities. For their part, the Sandinistas depend heavily on overland resupply, which could be slowed significantly by impassable roads and swollen waterways, especially in remote areas.

Tactically, both sides will also face difficulties, but again the insurgents will probably be able to maintain an edge. The Sandinistas' ability to react to insurgent initiatives will be slowed and the impact of their helicopters may be diminished as ground fog and thickened vegetation afford better protection to insurgent combatants. The rebels may also find moving into more populated regions easier in the wet season because of improved local food and water supplies and improved cover. On the other hand, overflowing streams and rivers will cut down on insurgent mobility outside their traditional operating areas. Exfiltration into Honduras may also be difficult with waits of up to a week to cross the Rio Coco.

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Meanwhile, there are some indications that the Sandinistas' manpower reserves are being strained. Recent reporting says the Sandinistas have been forced to call up reserve units from non-combat areas to reinforce units in the northwest as more experienced troops are shifted southward to deal with the increased fighting there.

WARNING ISSUE: Despite the insurgents' current strong performance, their logistics system remains fragile, and if the insurgents fail to cache adequate supplies or aerial resupply falters, large-scale exfiltrations may be necessary.

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El Salvador

3. There is some difference within the Intelligence Community over the implications of the recent attack on El Paraiso for both the insurgents and government forces. CIA believes the attack was largely a propaganda victory for the insurgents, demonstrating to the Salvadoran government and the international community that they remained a viable military force. They also achieved a long-standing goal of killing a US adviser. Moreover, according to CIA, the attack does not reflect a significant increase in guerrilla coordination. CIA believes additional attacks are unlikely in the near term because it involves months of planning and a major commitment of scarce resources.

-- DIA, as well as several other Community representatives, disagreed. They argue that the attack indicates good insurgent planning and persistent Salvadoran military weaknesses, and they believe more such actions may be in the offing.

WARNING ISSUE: The successful insurgent attack was a major propaganda victory primarily because of the death of a US adviser. As a result, while another major attack may not be imminent, US advisers may be in increasing danger.

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Peru

4. President Garcia's popularity remains his major strength in dealing with the military, especially in his efforts to follow through on plans to create a Ministry of Defense. At present there are divisions between the services over Garcia's initiative. Army commanders, for example, who believe they will benefit from a new Ministry are willing to back the President while the smaller Navy and Air Force believe they stand to lose resources. Indeed, the Air Force is the most persistent coup plotter. Garcia has made some key concessions that have assuaged military concerns at least for now. For example, he has authorized the services to draw up the implementing legislation for the new Ministry. Nonetheless, Garcia's high-handed management of the Ministry issue may permanently estrange the military from the administration. The armed forces are further disillusioned by his lackluster counterinsurgency strategy which has allowed the Sendero Luminoso to take firm roots in both rural and urban areas. While a coup is unlikely any time soon, one cannot be ruled out if Garcia's position deteriorates significantly in the coming months.

WARNING ISSUE: While the military is content for now, Garcia's failure to live up to his agreements will rekindle civil-military tensions and perhaps encourage the commanders to look for ways to remove him from office.

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Next 1 Page(s) In Document Denied